



*courtesy photo*

(From left to right) Carol, J.R., Andrea and Michael spend time together days before his deployment.

# Not just an Army of One

For every Soldier deployed there is a family waiting back home

**By Brian Murphy**  
INSCOM Public Affairs Office

It's difficult enough as a Soldier to learn that in one week you will be deploying to a desert halfway across the world during a time of war. Now imagine the reaction of that Soldier's parents when they learn their only son is off to make their life safer.

This is the less than enviable situation Sgt. Michael Root, a counterintelligence agent with the 308<sup>th</sup> Military Intelligence Battalion, 902<sup>nd</sup> MI Group, Fort Meade, Md., was faced with when he had to call his parents, J.R. and Carol, and inform them of his pending deployment last October.

"It was a very difficult phone call to make," Root said.

To say that everything happened unexpectedly would be an understatement. Somehow Root went from an everyday kid growing up in Phoenix, Az., to a soldier in the U.S. Army leaving for parts unknown.

"When I was growing up I always wanted to be

a doctor," Root said. "After I graduated from high school I went to the University of Arizona to study pre-med."

But much to Root's dismay, the university didn't offer a major in pre-med. Root decided to stay and changed his major to engineering, a decision he would soon regret.

"It didn't take long for me to get disheartened," Root said. "I quickly realized that I would always be just one of a hundred guys working on some sprocket on a piece of machinery. I was never going to get any recognition. I was never going to move up the ranks – I was just going to be an engineer. I decided that it wasn't for me."

Nine months later, in November 1999, Root decided to join the military.

"My father was supportive when I first told them I was joining the Army," he said. "He knew it would be a good place for me. He had spent four years in the Army when he was younger and looking back on it –



courtesy photo

**With deployments come sacrifices both big and small. When Root arrived at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait he shared a tent with 11 other Soldiers.**

he wished he had stayed in for 20 years. He didn't want to see me bouncing around from blue collar job to blue collar job my whole life."

Root's mother's reaction wasn't as positive. Carol responded ... well, as a mother.

"My mother was a little upset," Root admitted. "Her only son was leaving, and there was no telling where I would be going or what I would be doing. But at the time, with the exception of what was going on in Bosnia, it was a fairly peaceful time."

Root made it through basic training and his advanced individual training and reported to his first duty station, the 308<sup>th</sup> MI Battal-

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*Sgt. Michael Root,  
308th MI Battalion*

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ion, in August 2000.

Everything remained quiet until October 2002, when Root got the news that he would be deploying to the Middle East in one week's time.

"This isn't a unit where your bags are always packed and you're ready to go at a moment's notice," Root said. "It really did come as a surprise."

Root's parents, who are both retired after long careers with the local Arizona school district, were understandably upset at the news their son was leaving for the Middle East.

"As soon as they knew I was going away to war, they thought the worst. They thought that I was going to die," Root said.

Root's parents immediately cancelled everything and flew to Maryland to see their son.

"He's our only son," said J.R. Root, who served in the Army as a signal Soldier from 1960-1963. "With everything going on in the Middle East, we wanted him to

know that we loved him and supported him. It was very important to us to spend some quality time with him before he left."

Breaking the news to his parents wasn't the only tough phone call Root had to make. While all of this was going on he also had to inform his fiancée, Andrea, he would soon be leaving.

"She knew how tough everything was on me already," Root said. "So even though it was difficult for her as well, she was very supportive. She kept a smile on her face and did anything she could to help me."

The four of them spent as much time as possible together before Root's deployment.

"We tried to do normal stuff, like site-seeing," Root said. "But at the end of the night when I dropped them off at their hotel, I could see the tears in their eyes. You could tell that they were thinking 'I have two days left with my son before I may never see him again.' It was a really tough time for all of us."

Root stepped on a plane and left Fort Meade Oct. 25. After receiving all of the necessary deployment training at Fort Gordon, Ga., Root was off to Kuwait. Within days Root realized that everything wasn't as bad as he and his family had feared.

Although his deployment started with him living in a 12-man tent on Camp Arifjan, in Kuwait, Root remained positive.

"I got the chance to do my job the way it was intended to be done," Root said. "I deployed with Soldiers from the 513<sup>th</sup> MI Bri-

gade. They are constantly deploying or training to deploy. Some of the guys I was with were on their third deployment in a year and a half. They knew their stuff. It was nice for me personally to be out there with people like that.”

And much to the delight of Root’s parents, he never came anywhere near the heat of the war.

“There were no bullets flying by my head,” Root said. “Camp Doha had a few incidents, but things around Camp Arifjan were much quieter.”

Root was lucky to be able to keep in constant contact with his parents and fiancée. And once he talked them into limiting the amount of war coverage they would watch, the situation became less hectic for his loved ones as well.

Root returned home June 12, 2003.

“I watched the news, but my wife couldn’t,” said J.R. “It affected us in different ways. I wanted to be

up to date with what was going on over there, so I would watch every night. My wife reacted much like any mother would. She just wanted her son would get home safely.”

Reflecting back, Root cherishes the seven-month deployment.

“Once everything was over and I had the chance to look back I’m really glad I deployed,” Root said. “I’m definitely better at my job now that I have real-world training. You can only learn so much from a text book. I gained experiences I otherwise never would have had, and I had the chance to do my job the way it was intended to be done.”

That wasn’t the only benefit he walked away with.

“With all of the extra pay and the improved living conditions out there, it definitely wasn’t as bad as it could have been. I really couldn’t have asked for better conditions during a deployment,” he said.



**Sgt. Michael Root spent seven months in Kuwait with the 308th Military Intelligence Battalion.**

*courtesy photo*